

~~SECRET~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

NSC BRIEFING

17 July 1957

THE SITUATION IN THE GULF OF AQABA

I. The question of Israeli use of the Gulf of Aqaba poses serious problems for King Saud, who has deep personal feelings on the subject and who has also been put under considerable pressure by Nasser and by members of his own entourage to take a firm stand on the issue.

A. The Saudi argument that the Gulf of Aqaba is a closed "Arab sea" has been consistently supported by other Arab states, including Jordan and Iraq.

B. The King ordered the suspension of pilgrim traffic through the Gulf on the grounds of the security threat posed by the presence of Israeli forces, including small warships, at Eilat.

C. Nasser may use the situation as a means of forcing Saud into a position in which he must publicly make a choice between the Arab cause and his friendship with the US.

1. The issue already seems to have impeded US-Saudi negotiations on the terms of US grant aid for the

28
DOCUMENT NO. _____
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. IS _____
DECLASSIFIED _____
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S _____
EXT. REV. DATE: _____
AUTH: 10170-2 _____
REVIEWER: _____

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Dammam port and improvement of facilities at Dhahran airport.

2. It may be used by Nasser in attempting to split Saud from King Hussein and from Iraq.

II. The Israelis have not changed their contention as to the international character of the waterway and have been using it since the Sinai campaign last December.



25X6

III. The possibility of direct military moves, such as mining the Straits of Tiran or an attempt to block passage with Egypt's three newly acquired submarines and other naval craft, cannot be excluded.

-2-

~~SECRET~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

A. It is more likely that Saud will first convene a conference of Moslem states or use other political procedures as a means of protecting access to the Holy places of Islam.

1. A conference of this type might proclaim the existence of a "blockade", a situation which could involve US and other Western interests.

2. In addition to the submarines, Egypt has destroyers and other surface craft as well as IL-28 bombers, and has recently announced it will transfer to Saudi Arabia British-built jet fighter planes.

3. Actual interference with shipping bound to or from Eilat might bring about Israeli forceful action designed to keep the waterway open.

IV. In talks with Azzam Pasha, Saud's special representative, the US expressed its interest in seeing peace and tranquility preserved in the Gulf and on 12 July suggested in an aide memoire that:

A. Saudi Arabia consider taking the question of the Gulf's legal status to the International Court; the US would abide by the court's decision.

~~SECRET~~

- B. The US is prepared to seek restrictions on the use or the removal of Israeli naval and air forces from the Gulf.
- C. The US is prepared to ask US ships to avoid Saudi territorial waters and to give advance notice of intent to transit the Gulf.
- D. The US would support a UN resolution affirming the rights of Moslem pilgrims to undisturbed passage through the Gulf. (Source: secret State cable to American Embassy Jidda No. 57, 13 July)

-4-

~~SECRET~~